

Search for the Biggest Tree

By Ethan Snively

With its gnarly branches spanning over 115 feet, you could park three school busses end-to-end under this white oak's shade. It is currently the second largest tree in Macon County and is located in Hall Cemetery near Blue Mound, Illinois. This tree is estimated to be over 250 years old and would have been a large tree when Abraham Lincoln lived in Central Illinois!

Perhaps you have seen a tree this large or even bigger in Macon County. The Macon County Conservation District will be updating its Big Tree Registry in 2018, and encourages the community to nominate big trees. The species you nominate may even have the potential to qualify as a state or national champion.

Trees provide shade, oxygen, and beauty to our community. Along with our native prairies, trees improve our air and water quality by filtering pollutants from ground water and capturing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. They also provide habitat and food for wildlife, and on average add 10% to a property's value.



The Big Tree search is a great opportunity for families to explore the outdoors and search for trees in their backyards, neighborhoods, and parks. It is easy to participate in and only requires a tape measure. The best way to start your search is to measure the circumference, the distance around the trunk of the tree, at four and a half feet above the ground. This is a major factor in the tree's final score, along with tree height and crown width.

Please keep in mind that only the largest tree of each species nominated will become a county

champion. Besides white oak, some of the larger species growing in Macon County include eastern cottonwood, black walnut, red and bur oak, silver and sugar maple, and sycamore.

Nominations will be accepted through August 1, with champions announced the following spring. Find nomination forms with measuring instructions, the current Big Tree champions, and tree identification information at Rock Springs Nature Center and online at maconcountyconservation.org/big-tree-search.

Trees that qualify as a potential champion will be officially measured by Conservation District staff. The nominator and owner of the biggest tree of each species will receive a certificate establishing their tree as a Macon County Big Tree.

Connect with Us

Find out how you
can make a difference

217-423-7708

maconcountyconservation.org



New Nature Themed Playground



By Katherine Unruh

Thanks to generous donors, a new playground stands at Rock Springs Conservation Area. The previous one was in need of replacement. It came down in fall 2017 after serving our community for 20 years.

In a collaborative effort, community members donated over \$79,000 towards the new playground through the Macon County Conservation Foundation. Macon County Conservation District staff contributed time and energy for removing the old playground and preparing the site for the new one. This spring, District staff will put finishing touches on the new play space by planting native grasses and flowers.

The new playground is not just any playground.

The space between the two pavilions at Rock Springs has been reworked as a nature play area. Some traditional playground elements are still present, but now you can also climb a 6' high boulder and hop along stepping stones and tree stumps. These new elements will inspire more creative forms of play as children explore the natural world around them.

Watch the Macon County Conservation District Facebook page for a grand opening announcement at www.facebook.com/maconcountyconservationdistrict.

Thank You Playground Donors

- | | |
|---|--|
| Dr. Richard Fritz Memorial Fund | Larry and Dheena Altenbaumer |
| Nims Foundation | Mark and Susan Avery |
| Harriet and Norman Greenberg and Family | Keith and Kathy Casteel |
| Alexandra Kraus | Paul DeBruine Family |
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| David J. and Debra Rathje | Susan Vermette |
| Robert and Lucy Smith | Rodney B. Washburn |
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Special Events

MAPLE SYRUP PROGRAMS

Saturday, March 3, Hourly at 10am, 11am, 12pm, and 1pm

Discover how to make maple syrup from sap. We'll tap a tree, collect sap, boil it down over an open fire, and taste a sample of real maple syrup. Free. Register online by March 2. Min/Max: 5/30.

SANGAMON RIVER CLEANUP

Saturday, April 21, 10am-12pm

Make the river a safer and more beautiful place for both wildlife and people as you help clear trash from the banks of the Sangamon River. Dress to get dirty. Bring your own gloves if you can, as supplies are limited. Bags will be provided. Come by yourself or with the whole family. Organized groups should call 217-423-7708 in advance. Co-sponsored by Community Environmental Council. Registration between 9:30am and 10am at the Rock Springs Information Shelter.

FESTIVAL OF SPRING

Saturday, April 21, 12-4pm

Celebrate Earth Day and welcome spring with an afternoon of outdoor family activities. Enjoy wagon rides, canoeing, crafts, and learn what other organizations are doing in our community to benefit the planet. Co-sponsored by Decatur Audubon Society. Canoeing \$2/person. All other activities free. No registration required.



Briefs

SUMMER CAMPS

What better way to enjoy summer than exploring nature, discovering animal habitats, and making friends? We hope you and your children or grandchildren will join us for a summer of fun and learning at Rock Springs Conservation Area. This year's camp season runs from June 4 to August 10, 2018. You'll find many activities to choose from:

- **Mini Camp (ages 1-5):** Young children explore Rock Springs Conservation Area with their adult buddies in these 1 hour-long camps. \$6/child each camp.

- **Earth Adventures (ages 6-12):** Children hike, swim, canoe, and discover the world around them in this full-day, week-long nature camp with optional Before and After Child Care. \$120/camper each week.



- **Adventure Club (ages 5-12):** Children join in on Earth Adventures nature camp on Tuesday mornings. \$12/camper each day.

- **Pioneer Adventure Camp (ages 6-12):** Campers will take a trip through Illinois history, exploring different eras through crafts and activities in this Thursday morning camp. \$12/camper each day.

- **X-treme Camp (ages 10-15):** Older children seeking more adventure pack up for exciting daytrips, including horseback riding. \$60/camper.



Online registration opens April 2. Find more information at maconcountyconservation.org.

CAMPGROUND AND PAVILIONS OPENING

The campground at Friends Creek Conservation Area opens for the season on May 1. The campground welcomes RV and tent camping. It includes flush toilets, showers, and a dump station.

Daily fees for electric sites:

- \$17 for county residents
- \$20 for non-residents

Daily fees for non-electric sites:

- \$10 for county residents
- \$12 for non-residents



For more information, visit maconcountyconservation.org. Reserve your campsite by calling 217-423-7708.

The picnic pavilions at Rock Springs, Friends Creek, Fort Daniel, and Griswold are also open for the season. You can reserve a pavilion for \$35/day to host your own outdoor event at maconcountyconservation.org.

Take Your Pick

Below you'll find activities offered at multiple times or locations. Register online before the last full weekday prior to the program. Programs held at Rock Springs Conservation Area unless otherwise noted:

CANOE THE SANGAMON

Saturdays, April 14 and May 5, 10am-1pm

Paddle a canoe down one of our local waterways, the Sangamon River. All equipment provided. Bring a drink and clothes that could get wet. Must have at least one adult in each canoe. If river conditions are too low, we will canoe another route. Meet at Rock Springs Nature Center. Register early as spots go fast. \$25/canoe. Register online by April 13 and May 4. Min/Max: 3/8 canoes.



WILDFLOWER HIKES

Sundays, April 8 and May 13, 2-4pm

Venture into the forests and prairies with volunteer Jerry Sievers to search for beautiful spring wildflowers. We'll look for species of wildflowers such as Virginia Bluebell, Spiderwort, and more. Dress for a hike. Free. Register online by April 6 and May 11. Min/Max: 5/30.

Happenings

Events located at Rock Springs Conservation Area and open to all ages unless otherwise indicated. Register online at www.maconcountyconservation.org by noon, unless otherwise noted.



Macon County Conservation District

Hours

BUSINESS OFFICE OPEN

Monday-Friday, 8am-5pm

NATURE CENTER OPEN

Monday-Wednesday, Friday, 8am-5pm

Thursday, 8am-8pm

Saturdays, 9am-5pm

Sunday, 1-5pm

TRAILS OPEN

Daily, 7am to sunset

Holidays & Closings

OFFICES & NATURE CENTER CLOSED

Sunday, April 1, Easter Sunday

NATURE CENTER OPEN, OFFICES CLOSED

Friday, March 30, Good Friday

Monday, May 28, Memorial Day

Meetings

MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT BOARD MEETINGS

March 21, April 25 & May 16 at 5:30pm at Rock Springs Nature Center

DECATUR AUDUBON SOCIETY MEETINGS

Saturday, March 17, 2pm at Decatur Public Library

Sunday, April 15, 2pm at Rock Springs Nature Center

Saturday, May 19, 8am at Rock Springs Conservation Area Pavilion

MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT BOARD OF TRUSTEES & STAFF

Lucy Murphy, President

Norman Jensen, Vice President

Anne Elliott, Secretary

Doug Johnson, Treasurer

David White, Second Vice-President

Paul Marien, Executive Director

Shane Ravellette, Operations Manager

Richie Wolf, Nature Center Manager

Pam Smith, Finance & H.R. Manager

Contact Us

Macon County Conservation District • 217-423-7708

mccd@maconcountyconservation.org

www.maconcountyconservation.org



Ground Squirrels Vintage Base Ball Games

Join us for the national pastime: base ball! Cheer for your home team, the Rock Springs Ground Squirrels, in a game of vintage base ball played with authentic 1858 rules.

Saturday, April 14, 1pm

St. Louis, MO - Away game against St. Louis Unions at Jefferson Barracks Park



Saturday, April 28, 1pm

Decatur, IL - Home game against Alton Giants at Beautiful Trobaugh Field in Rock Springs Conservation Area

Follow the team on Facebook for additional games and more information, or visit maconcountyconservation.org.

Open Houses

BETHEL SCHOOL

Saturday May 5, 1-4pm

See what going to school was like in the early 20th century at this historic one-room schoolhouse located at Friends Creek Conservation Area. 13734 Friends Creek Park Rd., Cisco, IL. Free.

OGLESBY MANSION

Sundays, March 25, April 29, and May 27, 2-4pm

Tour the restored home of Illinois Governor Richard J. Oglesby. Encounter the lives of its family members and explore their late 1800s lifestyle. \$2/person. Members are free. 421 W. William Street, Decatur, IL.

Events located at Rock Springs Conservation Area and open to all ages unless otherwise indicated.
Register online at www.maconcountyconservation.org by noon, unless otherwise noted.

Music

The following programs are free and open to the public at Rock Springs Nature Center.

DULCIMER CLUB

Saturdays, 10am-12pm

March 10 & 24

April 7 & 21

May 5 & 19



BLUEGRASS MUSIC JAM

Sundays, 1-4pm

March 11, April 8, & May 13

CROSS COUNTRY CLASSICS

Thursdays, 6:30-7:30pm

March 1, April 5, & May 3

SHAPE-NOTE SINGING

Sunday, May 27, 2-4pm

Art

NORTH GALLERY ARTISTS

Sharon Blazer, March & April

Local photographer Sharon Blazer presents incredible images of landscapes, backyard animals, and birds.

Alan and Chris Perry, May & June

Enjoy scenic photos of a variety of nature subjects including wildlife, flowers, and landscapes from photographers Alan and Chris Perry.

SOUTH GALLERY ARTISTS

Tracey Maras, March & April

Connect with and develop a sense of wonder for the world around us through works in pastels and photography depicting flowers, animals, and breathtaking natural landscapes by Tracey Maras.



Kattina Williams, May & June

Explore nature photography featuring wild and exotic birds, wildlife, and nature scenes through the lens of local photographer Kattina Williams.

Mini Camps

Children ages 1-5 explore nature with an adult buddy through crafts, activities, songs, and stories. These camps are a great stepping stone for little ones to spend time with other children with the comfort of a loved one nearby. \$6/child. Online registration required. Min/Max: 4/12.

MAGICAL SPRING

Wednesday, March 7, 9:30-10:30am

Thursday, March 8, 9:30-10:30am

Check out what happens in nature during spring, as we discover how plants and animals adapt to the changing season. Register online by March 6.

HOPPING FROGS AND TOADS

Tuesday, March 20, 9:30-10:30am

Wednesday, March 21, 9:30-10:30am

Meet a frog and toad and learn about the lives of these amazing amphibians. Register online by March 19.



SHIMMERING RAINBOWS

Wednesday, April 4, 9:30-10:30am

Thursday, April 5, 9:30-10:30am

Discover rainbows and the colors of nature through activities, songs, and stories. Register online by April 3.

JUMPING RABBITS

Tuesday, April 17, 9:30-10:30am

Wednesday, April 18, 9:30-10:30am

Explore the life of rabbits through pretend play and use your senses to look at rabbit fur, tracks, and a skeleton. Register online by April 16.



BICENTENNIAL EXHIBIT OPEN THROUGH MAY

An exhibit titled *Illinois Bicentennial: A Macon County Story* is on display in Rock Springs Nature Center now through May. View artifacts from the Macon County History Museum and explore how the county developed over the years. Displays include toys, clothing, military artifacts, and tools from everyday life through the past 200 years. Admission is free.

Happenings

Events located at Rock Springs Conservation Area and open to all ages unless otherwise indicated. Register online at www.maconcountyconservation.org by noon, unless otherwise noted.

March

TRIP TO ILLINOIS STATE MUSEUM

Saturday, March 17, 11am-5pm

Discover Illinois' vast natural history through fossils and dioramas of species that lived millions of years ago. You will also learn about Illinois' rich Native American heritage and listen to stories from real people who lived in Illinois over the past 300 years. Bring a lunch or purchase one from a nearby restaurant. Admission is on your own. For all ages. \$20/person covers transportation and parking. Register online by March 16. Min/Max: 5/12.

PRESCHOOL PEEPERS: HOPPING ALONG

Sunday, March 18, 2pm

Imagine what it might be like to be a frog in a pond or a toad digging underground. Meet some of our live resident toads and frogs and do a fun frog themed craft. All ages welcome. Free. Register online by March 16. Min/Max: 5/30.



WONDERFUL WOOD DUCKS

Saturday, March 24, 2-4pm

Griswold Conservation Area

Uncover the lives of wild wood ducks: where they live, what they eat, and how we can help protect their habitat. First 3 groups to register will go home with a wood duck nesting box of their own. Free. Register online by March 23. Min/Max: 5/30.

TRIP TO CAHOKIA MOUNDS

Sunday, March 25, 11am-7pm

Explore one of the greatest ancient civilizations in North America. We will stop for a quick bite to eat along the way. Museum admission is free but donations are accepted. For all ages. \$25/person covers transportation. Register online by March 23. Min/Max: 5/12.

PIONEER NATURALIST: JOHN JAMES AUDUBON

Sunday, March 25, 2pm

Melody Arnold, President of Decatur Audubon Society, will explore the fascinating life and travels of famous naturalist John James Audubon. She will discuss his foray through Southern Illinois and the notable birds he observed there. Free. No registration required.

BOATER SAFETY CLASS

Tuesday and Thursday, March 27 and 29, 5-9pm

This 8 hour Illinois Department of Natural Resources class covers boating laws, boating terms, and safety requirements. Must attend both class days and pass a written test in order to receive your certificate. Free. Register online by March 26. Min/Max: 5/30.

April

RAG DOLL WORKSHOP

Saturday, April 7, 2pm

Rag Dolls are one of the most popular forms of children's toys throughout history. Create and personalize your own old-fashioned rag doll. All supplies provided. For all ages. Children 13 and under must be accompanied by an adult. Free. Register online by April 6. Min/Max: 5/30.



PRESCHOOL PEEPERS: GOING BATTY

Sunday, April 15, 2pm

Bat Appreciation Day occurs annually on April 17. Celebrate by learning all about bats, their important role in nature, and how you can help them overcome the challenges they face. Free. Register online by April 13. Min/Max: 5/30.

TRIP TO ALTON, IL

Monday, April 16, 10am-8pm

Immerse yourself in this classic river community. Visit numerous local attractions including Pere Marquette State Park, the Audubon Center at Riverlands, and the National Great Rivers Museum. Be prepared to do some hiking. All ages. Museum admissions and lunch at a local restaurant is on your own. \$25/person covers transportation and parking. Register online by April 13. Min/Max: 5/12.

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BIRD MIGRATION HIKE

Sunday, April 22, 2pm

Fort Daniel Conservation Area



Welcome back some of our native birds from their winter homes. Learn about various bird species and their songs on a bird identification hike. Free. Register online by April 20. Min/Max: 5/30.

DIPPING AND SCOOPING

Saturday, April 28, 10am-12pm

Uncover aquatic critters that live in our ponds and learn about their importance in the ecosystem. You will get to use a dip net to catch and hold critters such as crayfish, frogs, snails, and more. Be prepared to get muddy! Free. Register online by April 27. Min/Max: 5/30.

MONARCH MADNESS

Sunday, April 29, 2pm



Celebrate these beautiful migratory butterflies just in time for their big return from Mexico and California. You will discover what they eat, where they live, and how they protect themselves from predators. Help color a monarch mural that will go on display in Rock Springs Nature Center. Free. Register online by April 27. Min/Max: 5/30.

FULL MOON ASTRONOMY

Sunday, April 29, 7pm

Discover the night sky! On this program, you will view the full moon, learn about stars and constellations, and discuss basic astronomy. We will meet cloudy or clear. Free. Register online by April 27. Min/Max: 5/30.

Scout Workshops

FIND UPCOMING SCOUT BADGE WORKSHOPS AT

maconcountyconservation.org/scout-workshops

May

VISIONS OF THE PRAIRIE

Sunday, May 6, 2pm

The sweeping horizons of Illinois prairie, with grasses 6' high or more, have dazzled people for centuries. Explore the impressions this landscape left on poets and authors with author Dr. Dan Guillory. Alongside his own poetry and photographs, Dr. Guillory will reveal how the Illinois prairie defines a geographical and cultural place that continues to engage our eyes and imaginations. Free. No registration required.

FROG MUSIC HIKE

Saturday, May 12, 8-10pm

Celebrate National Frog Jumping Day by searching for as many species of frogs as you can find. Bring your flashlights as we scope out water habitats for glowing eyes shining back at us. We'll also try to catch some with nets and by hand. \$3/person or \$10/family. Register online by May 11. Min/Max: 5/30.



TRIP TO MISSOURI BOTANICAL GARDEN

Saturday, May 26, 11am-7pm

Explore 79 acres of magnificent horticultural displays full of plant species from tropical to temperate zones. Venture through indoor conservatories, formal gardens, and international gardens. Admission and lunch on your own. \$25/person covers transportation. Register online by May 25. Min/Max: 5/12.

WALLEYE FISHING TRIP TO LAKE ERIE

Sunday-Tuesday, June 24-26

Join us for a trip of a lifetime to fish for walleye on a charter boat. Price includes two day charter, fishing equipment, transportation, and lodging. Meals and license not included. Meet at the Information Desk at Rock Springs Nature Center. For all ages. \$445/person. Register online by June 15. Min/Max: 5/11.

Return Service Requested



2018 Summer Camps

Pick your summer adventure:

- Mini Camp ages 1-5
- Adventure Club ages 5-12
- Earth Adventures ages 6-12
- Pioneer Adventure ages 6-12
- X-treme Camp ages 10-15

maconcountyconservation.org